Backgrounder

B12/986

Military Sealift Command

D214.2:

Mission

The primary mission of the Military Sealift Command (MSC) is to provide sealift for strategic mobility in support of national security objectives. This mission, known as Strategic Sealift, demands the capability to deploy and sustain military forces wherever and whenever needed, as rapidly and for as long as operational requirements dictate. Strategic Sealift has been formally recognized as one of the Navy's three major functions, along with sea control and power projection. MSC is additionally required to carry out Naval Fleet Auxiliary and Special Mission Support missions.

The United States' forward military strategy uses the oceans as barriers in the nation's defense and as avenues for engaging an enemy. This forward strategy is dependent upon strategic mobility supporting the projection of power worldwide. Successful deployment and sustainment of military combat power in turn depend on prepositioning, airlift and sealift of equipment and supplies. Since more than 90 percent of all overseas cargo must go by sealift, it is clear that without adequate sealift, our forward strategy cannot be supported. MSC controlled ships can provide only a small part of that needed sealift capability—the remainder must be chartered or requisitioned from the U.S. Merchant Marine. A strong and viable U.S. Flag fleet is therefore essential to the successful deployment of U.S. forces overseas.

USNS Navasota replenishing the USS Bradley

SS Keystone State

Strategy

MSC discharges its mission through the employment of Sealift Forces originating from two principal sources: U.S. Government owned (or controlled) ships and the U.S. Merchant Marine. U.S. Government owned forces are operated by MSC or commercial contractors in peacetime or held in reserve in the National Defense Reserve Fleet and its readily available subset, the Ready Reserve Force. Regularly operating U.S. Flag fleet ships may be chartered or requisitioned for military use in time of war or national emergency. Other sources of Strategic Sealift include the Effective U.S. Controlled Fleet (EUSC) and applicable laws, treaties and international agreements such as those which provide for European NATO flag shipping. All these forces would be combined to provide MSC its composite Sealift Force in time of war or national emergency.

Responsibility

In furtherance of its overall mission, the MSC Force of 120-150 ships is applied to three functional areas. They are Strategic Sealift, Naval Fleet Auxiliary and Special Mission Support.

Strategic Sealift is the capability to deploy and sustain military forces wherever needed through afloat prepositioning, sea movement and delivery ashore of material, petroleum products and personnel. It is performed by the common user dry cargo ships, point-to-point tankers, passenger ships (when assigned), Ready Reserve Force, Fast Sealift Ships, Afloat Prepositioning Ships and Maritime Prepositioning Ships.

Direct support of the fleet units at sea worldwide allows Navy combatant ships to remain on station for long periods. This function is performed by MSC's Naval Fleet Auxiliary Force (NFAF) as part of Navy's total Mobile Logistic Support Force (MLSF).

The special mission needs of DOD sponsors for ocean-going ship support of such efforts as research, cable laying and repair, and missile tracking are met by MSC's Special Mission Support Ships.

MSC peacetime operations contribute directly to maintaining readiness for our primary mission to deploy and sustain forces in time of war and to facilitate a smooth transition into wartime operations. During transition the Strategic Sealift segment will expand significantly with the addition of merchant ships assigned by the Maritime Administration (MARAD). Also, the NFAF augmented by approximately 30-40 merchant ships, will provide fleet logistic support either directly to afloat MLSF or indirectly via forward supply bases.

Organization and Strength

MSC has approximately 8,500 civil service and military employees and contract mariners. Most Government owned, and in some cases, bareboat chartered ships operated by the command are manned by civil service mariners employed by the Navy. The total strength of the command's seagoing civilian force is approximately 4,400 people. The civilian shore-based work force includes over 1,500 employees. Approximately 400 Navy personnel are assigned ashore and about 500 Navy personnel serve on board MSC Naval Fleet Auxiliary Force or Special Mission Support Ships. Contract mariner manning within MSC now totals approximately 1,700.

Headquartered in Washington, D.C., MSC has area commands in London, England; Yokohama, Japan; Bayonne, N.J.; and Oakland, Calif. Slightly smaller sub-area commands are in Naples, Italy, and Subic Bay, Republic of the Philippines. Offices and units are located wherever sealift traffic requires. MSC is commanded by Rear Admiral Walter T. Piotti, Jr., who reports directly to the Chief of Naval Operations as a second echelon commander. Rear Admiral Richard F. Donnelly is the Vice Commander and Mr. Wallace T. San sone is the Deputy Commander.

USNS Stalwart

Strategic Mobility Planning

MSC must plan in peacetime how to perform its responsibility to move U.S. material and unit equipment where and when U.S. forces may require under various potential wartime scenarios. MSC is therefore an integral member of the Joint Deployment Community and provides the sealift planning needed to support the worldwide Operation Plans (OPLANs) of the Unified and Specified Commanders (CINCs) through computerized sealift feasibility analyses of their requirements for transocean movement of unit equipment, personnel and sustaining supplies. The results of these efforts are presented in the various OPLANs or the command's Logistical Support and Mobilization Plan (LSMP).

Sealift Resources

To carry out its strategic plans as well as its peacetime roles, MSC maintains its own Force of ships. At the beginning of fiscal year 1986, the MSC Force consisted of 122 ships: 26 Special Mission Support Ships, 31 Naval Fleet Auxiliary Force ships and 65 Strategic Sealift Ships including six Fast Sealift Ships, 11 specialized dry cargo ships, 21 tankers, 16 Afloat Prepositioning Ships, and 11 Maritime Prepositioning Ships.

Fast Sealift

The 1980s have seen a dramatic upsurge of interest in military sealift capability. Previously, military planners thought of sealift simply as long term reinforcement and ignored the need for versatility. Two new concepts—fast sealift and maritime prepositioning—have signaled a change in thinking.

The Navy purchased eight large containerships from private industry that were the fastest ships in the U.S. Merchant Marine. Their conversion to roll-on, roll-off Fast Sealift Ships (FSS) for lifting ground force unit equipment has resulted in a tremendous enhancement in sealift capability. The FSS enable MSC to load or offload in one day the majority of unit equipment (tanks, artillery, wheeled vehicles, etc.) for one Army mechanized or armored division. FSS sailing time can be as little as five days to Europe or two weeks to the Persian Gulf via the Suez Canal.

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Prepositioning

In 1979 the Secretary of Defense proposed to increase the responsiveness of Marine Corps forces requiring immediate and rapid deployment through a Maritime Prepositioning Ship (MPS) program. By mid-1980 the Navy's Military Sealift Command had created the Near Term Prepositioning Force stationed at Diego Garcia to fill the immediate need. By mid-1985 the 13-ship Maritime Prepositioning Ship program was more than half complete and a squadron of five MPS ships sailed for Diego Garcia to relieve the NTPF.

The full prepositioning force will include three squadrons. Four ships are in MPS Squadron One, already stationed in the Eastern Atlantic. Squadron Two consists of five MPS vessels at Diego Garcia plus 12 other prepositioned cargo ships and tankers loaded with Army and Air Force equipment, POL and supplies. The four ships in MPS Squadron Three will be deployed near Guam and Tinian in the Western Pacific in September 1986.

The 13 MPS vessels will be loaded with Marine Corps cargo to support three Marine Amphibious Brigades (MABs) of approximately 16,500 men each. The 12 prepositioned ships under Commander MPS Squadron Two support selected units of the Air Force and Army. All the prepositioned ships are contract manned and under charter to the Military Sealift Command.

Naval Reservists

To help meet its contingency mission, MSC is the training command and technical manager for MSC Naval Reserve units. Naval Reservists participate frequently in command post and live exercises. Reservists assigned to augment MSC headquarters and area commands within the United States also stand staff duty officer watches at their respective commands. Active duty personnel now assigned to MSC headquarters and offices worldwide constitute less than 20 percent of those who would be needed in the event of full mobilization; the remainder must come from the United States Naval Reserve.

Under his title as Assistant to the Chief of Naval Operations for Naval Control of Shipping (OP-06N), the Commander of MSC sponsors Naval Control of Shipping and Convoy Commodore Staff Naval Reserve

USNS Sealift Antarctic

USNS Zeus

Units. The Naval Control of Shipping Organization (NCSORG) is a reserve manned organization that will be responsible to the fleet commanders for the worldwide routing and control of Allied merchant ships during mobilizations and military contingencies.

Earnings/Expenditures

MSC worldwide operations are financed through the Navy Industrial Fund (NIF). The NIF is a revolving fund established to provide working capital for industrial or commercial activities of the Navy. MSC earns revenue to cover its expenses by charging its customers for services in a manner comparable to private business. The primary difference between a government industrial fund and a commercial business is that the objective of the government fund is to break even rather than to return a profit.

The NIF is designed to provide an effective mechanism for controlling the cost of services provided and a method of financing, budgeting and accounting for these operations. These controls allow MSC to measure the degree of efficiency and economy of its operations as well as to monitor its utilization of assigned funds, manpower and scarce sealift resources. In fiscal year 1985, MSC expenditures totaled more than $2 billion.

Strategic Sealift is the fastest growing segment of the Navy budget, thus reflecting its importance to national defense. Strategic mobility, including airlift, sealift and prepositioning, accounts for seven percent of the Defense budget.

USNS Capella

Looking Ahead

To sustain our forward military strategy and our strategic mobility capability in time of war, the Department of Defense through the U.S. Navy has instituted Strategic Sealift programs to augment and enhance the nation's maritime surge capability. In addition to its controlled and chartered fleet and the Ready Reserve Force, MSC would use the 17 prepositioning ships, eight T-AKR class Fast Sealift Ships, and 13 Maritime Prepositioning Ships to carry out its Strategic Sealift function.

Direct fleet support in peace—or if necessary, in war—is also being increased. Twelve additional ocean surveillance ships (T-AGOS) are scheduled to join the MSC Force by 1990, for a total of 18. The Ready Reserve Force will increase from the present 65 ships to at least 77 ships before 1988 and 119 ships by the year 1991. Sealift enhancements to these merchant ships will make them more militarily useful in forward deployment and supporting of forces.

In addition, future MSC fleet support for the armed forces includes:

- Two hospital ships with contract delivery dates in 1986 and early 1987.
- Twelve crane ships to be operational by FY 1991.
- Two aviation support and supply ships by FY 1987.
- Three additional T-5 tankers to be delivered in FY 1986.
- Seventeen T-AO 187 fleet oilers with delivery beginning FY 1986 and continuing through 1995.
- Nineteen special mission ships and an experimental hulled ship are also planned for addition to the MSC Force.
- Fifteen oceanographic research ships begin delivery in FY 1987.
- One acoustic research ship in FY 1989.
- One deep submergence vehicle support ship in FY 1985.
- Two oceanographic survey ships in FY 1987.
- One SWATH T-AGOS, or double-hulled experimental design ocean surveillance ship, to be delivered in FY 1987.

Combined, the Navy sealift enhancement programs will pump more than $15 billion into the maritime economy by the end of the 1980s. Not only will this money contribute substantially to the nation's defense, but it will also benefit ship owners, operators, builders, maritime labor and the national economy as a whole.

Wars and other emergencies during the last three decades, most recently the Falkland Conflict, have vividly demonstrated sealift requirements and capabilities in crises. The Military Sealift Command maintains a Strategic Sealift core of readily available ships and trained personnel to assure its ability to perform its Strategic Sealift mission.

MV 2nd LT John P. Bobo

MV Gus W. Darnell

If you are interested in seagoing employment with MSC, and you possess current Coast Guard License or Document write:

East Coast - Military Sealift Command Atlantic • Bayonne, New Jersey 07002-5399

West Coast - Military Sealift Command Pacific • Naval Supply Center • Oakland, California 94625-5010

Or Call - East Coast 201-823-6347

West Coast 415-466-4670